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BRA

3073

Boulevard Planning Districts

Dorchester Avenue Boulevard Planning District

Staff Briefing

October 23, 1986

The following material has been prepared by DAVID DIXON, AIA, in conjunction with the BRA's Zoning and Urban Design Departments in conjunction with the Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study

1. Structure for boulevard urban design studies within IPOD process

- Revitalization
- Restoration
- Parkway

2. Dorchester Avenue--example of major boulevard

- Project Structure
- Phase I (Strategy)
 - Overview
 - Resources and Problems
- Initial Findings: Urban Design Tools
 - Next Steps

3. Market Analysis for Dorchester Avenue

- Process
- Initial Observations
- Process for other boulevards

4. Traffic and Parking for Dorchester Avenue

- Process
- Process for other boulevards

5. Discussion

Notes:

I have attached a series of diagrams describing a draft proposed structure for the Boston Redevelopment Authority's "Grand Boulevards" program; the diagrams reflect the results of initial discussions between my office and Zoning and Urban Design Department staff at the BRA. The attached materials covers the following concerns:

- the relationship of boulevard urban design studies to the larger IPOD process
- a broad project structure for approaching individual boulevard studies within the IPOD process
- potential organization of individual boulevards into study groups in three IPOD areas
- a more detailed project structure for Dorchester Avenue

Project Context:

The major streets which serve Boston's traditional neighborhoods are the subjects of the Boston Redevelopment Authority's "Grand Boulevards" program. These boulevards, the principal commercial, residential, and parkway arteries and gateways for Boston's older neighborhoods, contribute substantially to establishing the identity and character of the areas they serve. Many boulevards are lined with fine examples of residential and commercial architecture representing the urban aspirations of several generations; others still constitute visible extensions of Boston's ambitious City Beautiful movement. Despite the long period of economic transition which followed World War II and drained investment from many older parts of the city, Boston's boulevards have maintained ~~the~~ their potential to serve again as proud, dynamic, symbols of resurgent neighborhoods.

In most cases the boulevards' strong underlying urban design qualities have been obscured and distorted by several decades of neglect and insufficient awareness of their urban design potential. Excessive inappropriate signage, vacant land and buildings coupled in some cases with insensitive new construction, and an invasion of incompatible uses. The different types of boulevards present both unique and common challenges. While ultimately each boulevard must be studied in the context of its own issues and resources, for purposes of establishing broad, "generic", model scopes, the boulevards have been divided into three categories:

- **Revitalization:** major residential and commercial streets in neighborhoods for which economic revitalization is the primary objective; these boulevards are critical to creation of jobs, housing, and adequate local access to shopping and neighborhood services; enhancing the urban design character of these boulevards, while a critical concern, should occur in the context of a larger revitalization effort.

- **Restoration:** major residential and commercial streets in neighborhoods for which, while economic vitality is often an important concern, the primary focus is on restoring and enhancing traditional neighborhood character.

- **Parkway:** major public streets which constitute important neighborhood, and often city-wide, open space amenities; a number of parkways are critical living links to Frederick Law Olmsted's grand open space plan for Boston; all of the parkways have the potential to enrich Boston's re-emerging open space system.

note: a single boulevard may in some cases make a transition from one category to another (e.g. from "Revitalization" to "Restoration") , for example, as it moves from one neighborhood to another.

**Examples of
Boulevards in
each category:**

	Revitalizationon	Restoration	Parkway
small projects	Warren St., Seaver St.	Market St., Harvard Ave.,	Melnea Cass
medium projects	Shawmut Ave., Dudley St., Columbia Rd., Mass. Ave., Columbus Ave. (?), Tremont St.(?)	Dorchester Ave., Washington St. (South End), Commonwealth Ave., Market St., Brighton Avenue,	Jamaica Way
larger projects	Washington St. (Rox.), Blue Hill Ave.		



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Boulevard Urban Design Studies: Relationship to IPOD Process

month: 3 6 9 12 15 18 21 24

IPOD Period:

Initial BRA actions:

- organize study areas
- set up community participation

Neighborhood-wide economic resources analysis:

(Revitalization Boulevards)

neighborhood-wide economic revitalization strategy; determine appropriate role of each boulevard

Neighborhood Traffic Masterplan:

(all boulevards as required)

existing conditions forecast "quick fixes" & test/preliminary develop short/long term measures measures

Boulevard Urban Design Studies:

(all boulevards as required)

Phase I: Strategy

Existing Conditions:
• Inventory
• Analysis: existing and potential urban design character
Identify Urban Design Tools to Create Change
Develop Objectives: urban design vision
Strategy

Phase II: Implementation

Preliminary Implementation Proposals: Urban Design Tools
Final Proposals: Final Report

Follow-up Efforts:

- resolve open issues with community, etc.
- resolve details of community participation in setting design controls, design review, etc.
- initiate follow-up studies—e.g. detailed proposals for special study districts, detailed design for capital improvement projects, facade/signage improvement program

Zoning Implementation:

- public hearing
- prepare language
- BRA Hearing
- Zoning Commission

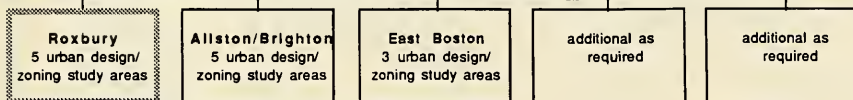
Community Participation

Summary of proposed structure for urban design/zoning studies:

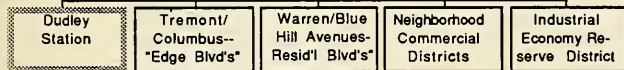
BRA project management:

- identify City policy objectives
- establish inter-agency working groups

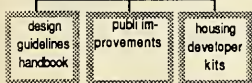
boulevards and special study areas grouped into appropriate urban design/zoning study areas within each neighborhood—see attached diagrams



urban design/zoning study areas (using Roxbury as example)—see attached diagrams



potential individual follow-up projects (using Dudley Station study area as example) include:



Neighborhood-
wide scale

Roxbury

Principal Tasks:

BRA: (1) identify appropriate boulevard groups; (2) conduct neighborhood-wide traffic study; (3) conduct economic resources allocation analysis

single urban design prime consultant for each study area (market, landscape and traffic sub-consultants as required)

Urban
Design/
Zoning
Study
Areas

#1 Dudley Station:

Washington St., Dudley St., Shawmut Ave, Dudley Station Special Study Area, Washington St. Affordable Housing Reserve District

Principal Tasks:

BRA:

- set up community participation

Consultant :

Phase I (Strategy)

- existing conditions
- market assessment
- urban design vision

Phase II (Proposals)

- urban design proposals
- zoning

**#2 Tremont/
Columbus--"Edge
Boulevards:"**

Tremont St., Columbus Ave., Mass. Ave., Melnea Cass, Melnea Cass Affordable Housing Reserve District, Tremont St. Special Study Area

Principal Tasks--see
Dudley Project Area

**#3 Warren/Blue Hill
Avenues--
Residential Boule-
vards:**

Blue Hill (Rox.), Warren Ave., Blue Hill Ave. Special Study Area

Principal Tasks--see
Dudley Project Area

**#4 Neighborhood
Commercial Dis-
tricts:**

Geneva Ave., Washington St., Strathcona Rd., Centre St. Humboldt Ave., Norfolk St., Quincy St.

Principal Tasks--see
Dudley Project Area

**#5 Industrial Econ-
omy Reserve Dis-
trict**

Principal Tasks--see
Dudley Project Area
plus work to be deter-
mined

Individual urban design, land-
scape, or architectural consul-
tant teams for each project ea

Individual
Follow-up
Projects

Example #1

detailed design proposals for
public improvements in Dudley
area

Example #2

signage and facade program/
guidelines handbook for major
commercial avenues

Example #3

detailed housing site study

Neighborhood-wide
scale

Allston/Brighton

Principal Tasks:

BRA: (1) identify appropriate boulevard groups; (2) conduct neighborhood-wide traffic study; (3) conduct economic resources allocation analysis

single urban design prime consultant for each study area (market, landscape and traffic sub-consultants as required)

Urban
Design/
Zoning
Study
Areas

**#1 Soldiers' Field Rd./
Western Ave. Area:**

Soldiers' Field Rd., Western Ave.,
Lincoln St./Holton Rd. Special
Study Area, Soldiers' Field Rd./
Western Ave. Special Study Area
Principal Tasks:

BRA:

- set up community participation

Consultant:

Phase I (Strategy)

- existing conditions
- market assessment
- urban design vision

Phase II (Proposals)

- urban design proposals
- zoning

**#2 Commonwealth/
Harvard/Brighton
Avenues**

Principal Tasks--see
Study Area #1

#3 Allston Landing

Principal Tasks--see
Study Area #1
plus work to be determined

#4 Brighton Center

Washington St., Market
St., Brighton Ave

Principal Tasks--see
Study Area #1
plus work to be determined

**#5 Additional Special
Study Areas:**

Electric Ave., Goodenough St., Ashford St.

Principal Tasks--see
Study Area #1
plus work to be determined

Individual urban design, landscape, or architectural consultant teams for each project as

Individual
Follow-up
Projects

Example #1
signage and facade
improvements program/guidelines
handbook

Example #2
detailed development
implementation studies
for Special Study Areas

Neighborhood-
wide scale

East Boston

Principal Tasks:

BRA: (1) identify appropriate boulevard groups; (2) conduct neighborhood-wide traffic study; (3) conduct economic resources allocation analysis

single urban design prime consultant for each study area (market, landscape and traffic sub-consultants as required)

Urban
Design/
Zoning
Study
Areas

#1 Waterfront Special Study Areas:

Massport Piers, Boston East, Maverick Central, Chelsea Creek

Principal Tasks:

BRA:

- set up community participation

Consultant:

Phase I (Strategy)

- existing conditions
- market assessment
- urban design vision

Phase II (Proposals)

- urban design proposals
- zoning

#2 Suffolk Downs--McClellan Highway:

Special Study Area, McClellan Highway:

Principal Tasks--see Study Area #1

#3 East Boston Boulevards:

Chelsea St., Meridian St., Bennington St., Brement St. Special Study Area

Principal Tasks--see Study Area #1 plus work to be determined

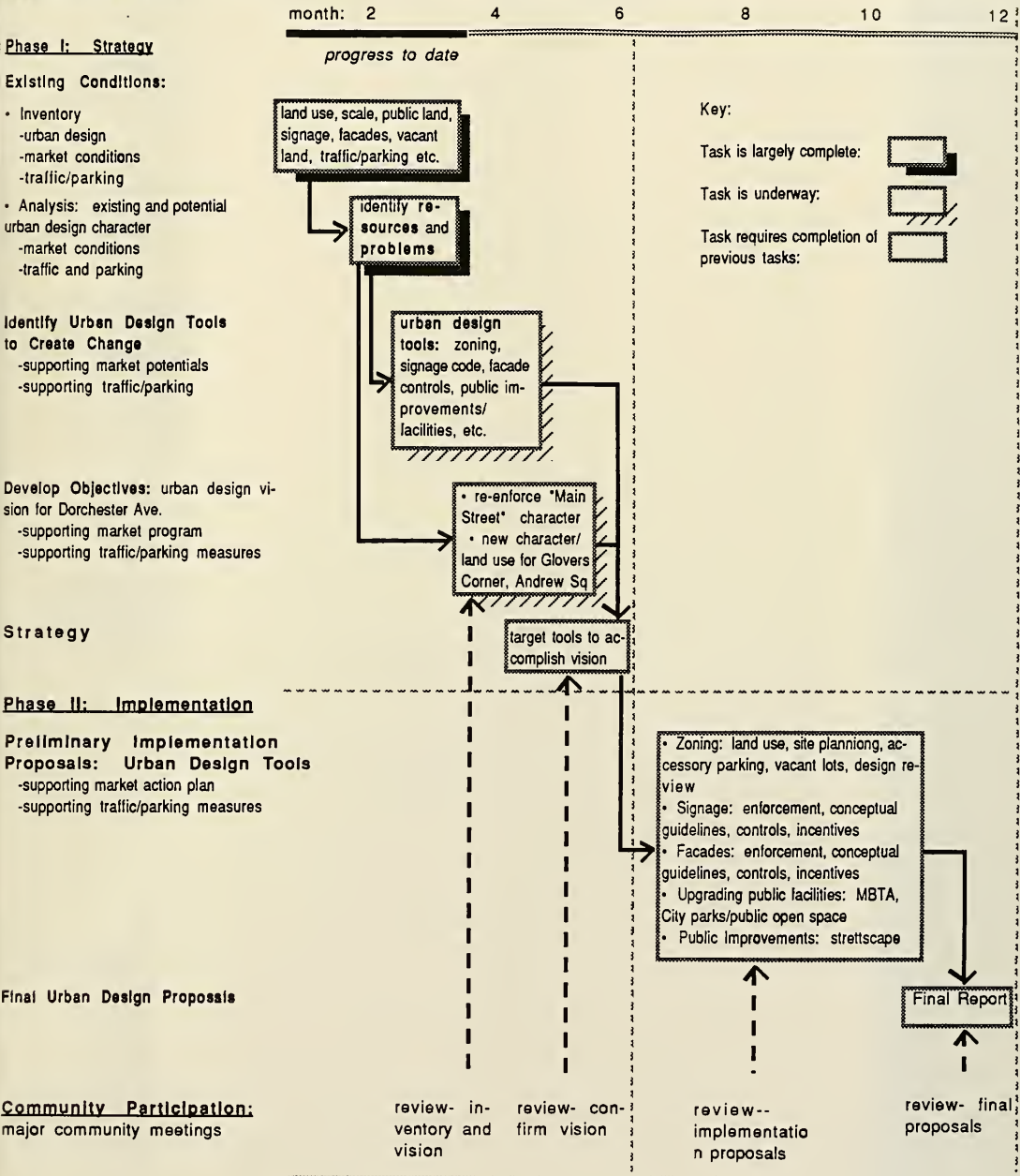
Individual urban design, landscape, or architectural consultant teams for each project as

Individual
Follow-up
Projects

Example #1
detailed Waterfront Architectural Standards--guidelines/handbook

Example #2
Waterfront public improvements design/capital improvements program

Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study: Project Structure:
Restoration Boulevard





1) Resources:

Lower Mills to Peabody Square:

Fields Corner and Approaches:

Glovers Corner/Savin Hill:

Columbia Road to Andrew Sq.:

• **Basic building stock:** consistent underlying older commercial and/or residential buildings create the potential for an attractive older "Main St." character along much of the avenue

• **Landmarks:** an impressive collection of churches, mill buildings, larger commercial blocks, and some monuments contribute significantly to establishing the changing character of the Avenue

• **Streetscape improvements:** new sidewalk paving, street lights, and similar improvements play a strong role in some areas-- in establishing a positive character along the Avenue-- new tree planting enhances character from Lower Mills to Columbia Road area

• **Open Space:** the Avenue's very limited open space provides the potential to enhance key areas

• **Positive Relationship to Adjacent Area:** the Avenue's functional and physical connections to the adjacent side streets are much stronger in some areas than others-- the Avenue generally maintains the character of a neighborhood "Main Street" where this connection is strong

• Other

Lower Mills	Gallivan Blvd	Peabody Sq	Peabody Sq to Fields Corner	Fields Corner	Glovers Corner/Savin Hill:	Columbia Rd	Andrew Sq
strong commercial "Main St." character and "village center" identity	strong residential character	interesting mix of buildings create unique mixed-use turn-of-the-century character "village center" identity	strong "Main St." character	turn-of-the-century collection of buildings-- strong potential for major traditional commercial center	small groupings of attractive retail/residential buildings indicate area's former character	mixed retail & residential buildings on both sides create varied "Main St."	
mill buildings and churches establish Lower Mill's unique character	institutional buildings contribute to character	Peabody Sq clock contributes to Square's character	churches re-enforce character	churches and major commercial buildings re-enforce character		churches contribute to character-- particularly St. Margarets at Columbia road	
traditional improvements and new trees enhance and enrich the area's historic character	new trees enhance area	new trees enhance area	new trees enhance area	traditional improvements and new trees enhance character-- emphasize handsome buildings	new trees will provide some visual relief from chaotic environment	new trees enhance area	
	Dorchester Park edge is attractive, strong visual amenity; cemetery and Boston Home also contribute to "green" residential character	small park and landscaping associated with church, apartment house, etc contribute to area's attractive character		Town Field is well used, and potential important visual amenity and civic space		small Ryan playground provides use and visual amenities	
commercial uses serve neighborhood	residential buildings consistent with adjacent side-streets; Carney Hospital serves Dorchester community	strong-- commercial uses serve neighborhood	commercial uses serve community; residential buildings are consistent with adjacent side-streets	generally strong relationship to immediate neighborhood and potential center for larger Dorchester community		commercial uses serve community; residential buildings are consistent with adjacent side streets	weak visual/functional relationship to adjacent residential neighborhoods; consistent with industrial area to the north.
appropriate signage reveals handsome buildings		some excellent signage emphasizes and enriches handsome buildings		appropriate signage reveals handsome buildings	small groupings of attractive retail/residential buildings indicate area's former character		

Note: **bold face text** indicates highly significant resource

2) Problems:

• **Land Use Conflicts:** incompatible auto-related and industrial uses detract from neighborhood character

• **Signage:** inconsistent signs, often incompatible and considerably out of scale with adjacent buildings, significantly obscure the visual qualities of the Avenue's buildings

• **Facades:** incompatible store fronts and some residential "fronts" compete with and detract from the Avenue's traditional architecture

• **Public Facilities:** due to poor maintenance and other problems, a number of public facilities do not realize their considerable potential to enhance the avenue in some cases they significantly obscure the Avenue's urban design character

• **Accessory Parking:** excessive parking lots directly facing the Avenue interrupt the Avenue's rhythm of attractive older commercial and residential buildings with hard, visually bleak, pavement

• **Vacant Land:** overgrown vacant lots interrupt building rhythm in some areas, contribute to blighted quality in others

• **Billboards:** out of scale signs strongly contradict Avenue's neighborhood character and are more appropriate to highway environment

• **Others**

Lower Mills to Peabody Square:

Fields Corner and Approaches:

Glovers Corner/Savin Hill:

Columbia Road to Andrew Sq.:

Lower Mills	Gallivan Blvd	Peabody Sq.	Peabody Sq. to Fields Corner	Fields Corner	Glovers Corner/Savin Hill:	Columbia Rd.	Andrew Sq.
	auto-related uses at Gallivan Blvd. interrupt residential neighborhood	auto related and small industrial uses to either side of Square disrupt "village center" character	scattered auto related and smaller industrial uses obscure traditional character	auto related uses to either side of Fields Corner disrupt "neighborhood center" character	Industrial/auto related uses dominate land use pattern and create "strip" environment which does not relate to the neighborhood	major industrial use, excessive commercial street-fronting parking and auto related uses disrupt traditional mixed-use Main St. character	mixed zoning districts create use conflicts--contribute to "anonymous" character
	more consistent signage would enhance handsome building stock	some signage detracts from potential character, more consistent signage would enhance handsome building stock	signage generally detracts from traditional mixed-use Main St character	excessive signage significantly disrupts rich underlying character of handsome commercial buildings	excessive signage emphasises chaotic character of uses and buildings signage contributes to strip character	inappropriate signage obscures character, especially in five blocks south of Columbia road	excessive, poorly designed signage detracts from Andrew Square
	some storefronts obscure underlying handsome character of buildings	a number of storefronts obscure the underlying handsome character of buildings		inappropriate facades disrupt character of buildings and obscure area's turn-of-the-century character	extensive poor quality facades create bleak public environments- particularly when facades contain few windows	inappropriate facades disrupt character of mixed-use buildings near Columbia Road	poor quality facades contribute to bleak public environment
	Dorchester Park needs restoration -- improvements in design safety, programmed use	Ashmont Station street edge is poorly landscaped		Town Field visually "tired", fails to enhance and mark area's "civic stature" as commercial center for Dorchester MBTA station/ overpass detract from Field's Corner's character--could provide significant gateway		Ryan playground would enhance Avenue by replacing hard edge with landscaping and more "soft" play areas	MBTA station and related street construction add to bleak environment and fail to create public space
	lot at corner of Richmond street interrupts "village center" character	lots facing street detract from Square and approaches		lots facing street and set-back park buildings detract from "neighborhood center character"	excessive lots facing street with set back buildings reinforce strip environment		Andrew Sq. is dominated by parking lots facing street, reinforce anonymous character
		Boston Edison Site vacant and overgrown--creates blighting gap in Square; bleak vacant parcels north of the square detract from visual quality.		vacant land between shopping center and MBTA station creates blight/ opportunities			extensive vacant and underutilized land reinforce anonymous character
				billboards are highly inappropriate to area's traditional character			billboards contribute to bleak environment. Lack of tree planting reinforces anonymous character
				shopping center is bleak and distracts significantly from area's traditional character--fails to reinforce commercial stature due to isolation			

Note: bold face text indicates highly significant problem

• **Conclusions--Urban design tools:**

1. **Zoning**

- land use (encourage desirable uses, prevent new incompatible uses)
- accessory parking (future parking -- site planning, landscaping, ratio requirements; existing parking-- require improvement in conjunction with new building permits)
- vacant sites (maintenance and standards for fencing, landscaping)
- design review (significantly increase scope to encourage appropriate improvements)
- special neighborhood center districts (unique requirements to re-enforce uses and urban design character of individual districts)

2. **Signage Code**

- design guidelines
- handbook, design assistance program
- strict enforcement (for existing signs under current regulations and future signs under new regulations)

3. **Architectural Design Controls**

- storefront /commercial facades design controls
- residential rehabilitation design guidelines
- handbook, design assistance program and guidelines
- strict enforcement of new controls

4. **Public Improvements**

- public facilities
- public open space
- streetscape improvements

5. **Financial Incentives**

- signage
- commercial facades
- site landscaping improvements

6. **Billboards--** pursue solution at Federal level

7. **Others**

Lower Mills to Peabody Square:

Fields Corner and Approaches:

Glovers Corner/Savin Hill:

Columbia Road to Andrew Sq.:

Lower Mills	Gallivan Blvd	Peabody Sq.	Peabody Sq. to Fields Corner	Fields Corner	Glovers Corner/ Savin Hill	Columbia Rd	Andrew Sq.
re-enforce existing	re-enforce existing/ prevent expansion of auto related uses	re-enforce existing/ prevent expansion of auto related uses	re-enforce existing/ prevent expansion of auto related uses	re-enforce existing/ strengthen mixed- use center	determine future desirable land use pattern	re-enforce existing/prevent expansion of auto related uses and industrial use	determine future de- sirable land use pat- tern
potential impact: moderate	low	moderate	moderate	critical	critical	moderate	critical
potential impact: low	moderate	moderate	moderate	low	high	critical	critical
re-enforce historic character	residential character	unique mixed-use/ historic character	mixed-use "Main St." character	traditional commercial center character	determine future desirable character	mixed-use "Main St." character	determine future desirable land use pattern
establish-re-enforce existing character		establish-re-enforce existing character		establish-re-enforce existing character			establish-define future direction
potential impact: moderate	moderate	high	moderate/high	critical	critical	moderate/ high	critical
potential impact: moderate	moderate	high	high	critical	critical	moderate/ high	critical
	Dorchester Park	Ashmont MBTA station Boston Edison site streetscape improvements		Town Field Fields Corner MBTA station and over-pass		Ryan playground	Andrew Square MBTA Red Line station and bus facility; tree planting and streetscape improvements
signage, facades	residential exteriors	signage, facades, residential exteriors, site landscaping	signage, facades, residential exteriors	signage, facades, residential exteriors, site landscaping	appropriate programs depend on future use, character	signage, facades, residential exteriors, site landscaping	signage, facades, residential exteriors, site landscaping
potential impact: low	low	moderate	low	moderate	high	moderate	high
				special urban shopping center district			

Note: **bold face** text indicates urban design tool could have high or critical impact on enhancing urban design environment

